

# I Am Not A Machine, I Am A Human Being

## Technology As Mediation

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with self-established provocation from Jerry Mander\*

*...it struck me that there was a film between me and all of that. I could “see” the spectacular views. I knew they were spectacular. But the experience stopped at my eyes. I couldn’t let it inside me. I felt nothing. Something had gone wrong with me. I remember childhood moments when the mere sight of the sky or grass or trees would send waves of physical pleasure through me. Yet now... I felt dead. I had the impulse to repeat a phrase that was popular among friends of mine, “Nature is boring.” What was terrifying even then was that I knew the problem was me, not nature. It was that nature had become irrelevant to me, absent from my life. Through mere lack of exposure and practice, I’d lost the ability to feel it, tune into it, or care about it. Life moved too fast for that now...*

I am reasonably unsure where **I** (in the purely egoist sense) *end* and **everything else** *begins*. It is somewhat vague and amorphous, and, well, subjective. I don’t mean to sound like a fucking hippie here, but as I search for an authentic and unmediated life free of (or at least minimizing) alienated circumstances (from myself, others, and the world around us), the edges and essences of who I am (and who I am not) must be examined. One thing I will say with a fair amount of measurable conviction, is that ***I am not a machine...*** I will not confine what I am intimately connected with to those people with whom I have a formal relationship, nor exclusively humans, nor those animals with vertebrae, nor that which we typically consider “alive”– as some have suggested, “stones can speak”, and therefore they may also listen, act, and emote. I am thrilled to explore these possibilities and peculiarities. But, when it comes to “technology”<sup>1</sup>, or the deadness of space it controls (physical, psychological, and institutional), I have no delusions (nor futuristic orgasmic revelations) of connection to it, nor its supposed benign neutrality (nor naturalness).

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<sup>1</sup> “Technology” is used in quotes, because it is not a simple word with a simple definition, despite those who wish to fix it for everyone based on their own biased understanding of history. Even in the common usage of the term there is much incongruence. While this essay may shed light on the author’s particular usage, the meaning still seems somewhat amorphous and contextual. In this context, it is generally used to describe the complex system of tools and techniques that separate ourselves from direct experience, and the ideological and institutional logic which perpetuates and maintains these systems. It is an ideology of technique, systematic treatment, and progressive

I will utilize the technological infrastructure and some of its segments where and when I feel that I, or a collaborative effort, can have a momentary benefit for an immediate or a long-term process within, or despite, technology's overall and inevitable dominance and degradation (i.e. using a computer to put out a publication critiquing and strategizing against civilization). Ultimately, it is impossible to reject the idea that technology is an unhealthy conglomeration or system of tools not designed for my support or health, controlled and motivated by an inorganic and anthropocentric mindset of control, efficiency, and order. It is an incredibly powerful network of domination projected by the concept of progress and separation. Technology has determined the circumstances of our world more than any other single factor (capitalism, racism, government, theology, etc.). It literally creates the physical, social, and psychological playing field in which all forms of domination function. It makes the rules, and perpetually re-writes them based on its own self-referential logic. Technology is the religion of our time, and as it has a staggeringly comprehensive control of our minds, bodies, and spirit, ***it must be destroyed***<sup>2</sup> if we are to live unmediated and unrestrained lives.

Technology's devastating influence is vast, but for the sake of brevity and focus, I choose *not* to dwell on the ecological devastation caused by the production, development, functioning, and perpetuation of technologic society, nor the toxicity it creates (that which is killing all of us on the cellular and genetic level). The impact in this realm is well documented and understood, and the wide-spread comprehension of these factors, while extremely relevant (soberingly so), has not altered the trajectory of the technologic nightmare in the least. In fact, those who dwell exclusively in the realm of "environmental impact", seem at best to argue only for a more "sustainable", "greener", and "compassionate" technology – a solar powered police state which never questions basic assumptions of civilized relations. This only strengthens the technological society by adapting its infrastructure (or mere facade) to popular trends and tendencies, extending its existence. And, although the production aspects in a technologically-driven society, as well as the workers manipulated and coerced into its functioning, is another valuable subject to explore, the topic is huge, and one, I might add, that has been addressed with much more potency and immediacy than I could offer.

The questions I prefer to ask have more to do with technology's impact and effect on the personal and the social in reference to alienation, technological dependence and addiction, spiritual and emotional unhealth, shifts in perception of time and space, automation, technology's ever-strengthening control, and the trajectory towards cybernetic neo-lives. Recognizing the contradictions we face, and possible directions ahead, are also of immense importance to our particular situation as civilized humans at the beginning of the 21st Century, longing for a completely different, non-technocratic world.

*As humans have moved into totally artificial environments, our direct contact with and knowledge of the planet has been snapped. Disconnected, like astronauts floating in space, we cannot know up from down or truth from fiction. Conditions are appropriate for the implantation of arbitrary realities.*

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industrial science.

<sup>2</sup> It is understood that "technology" cannot be merely destroyed in the physical sense, like you can destroy a car or television. To "destroy technology" is to analyze, understand, critique, abandon, and attack all of the institutional, cultural, and personal manifestations of the technological system. It is no easy feat.

Alienation is the method or state of being separated from something (or everything) we were once (or intrinsically) connected to. Personal and social alienation is inherent in the technological process. This disconnect from life is the primary source of our condition of domestication, without which it would be much harder (even impossible) to manipulate and control us. This has always been the principle mode of control. Separate people from their land and recontextualize them through methods, processes, and techniques they are unfamiliar with; insulate them from who they are. It is precisely because we are floating through the world without connections to the actual substance of life, that we can be tied to and driven by external agendas and artificial pushes and pulls. Technology is the primary source of this alienation, in every sector of our lives. In an ever-expanding process, the world has been constructed to limit our connections outside the technological paradigm. What aspects of our life are not directly linked to the technological process? Are there any forms of “connection” between people that are not mediated through technological means?

On the personal level, our lives become alienated through clocks, pharmaceuticals, microwaves, processed food, television, white noise, concrete, machinery, computers, electric lighting, air conditioning...On the social level, we are alienated from each other through telephones, email, pop culture, ipods, highways, housing developments, voting booths, spectacles...At this point in civilization's trajectory, it is difficult for most to even comprehend an unmediated (and non-technological) existence; with those who can still imagine such a reality labeled as wingnuts and extremists. But within the logic of this technological nightmare, those of us who are nevertheless able to conceive of another set of relationships are truly mad, and the only response, according to its paradigm, must be extreme. But within another context, that of an uncivilized reality, we are sane and ordinary. We are humans *being*.

*What we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, feel, and understand about the world has been processed for us. Our experiences of the world can no longer be called direct, or primary. They are secondary, mediated experiences...We are surrounded by a reconstructed world that is difficult to grasp how astonishingly different it is from the world of only one hundred years ago, and bears virtually no resemblance to the world in which humans beings lived for four million years before that...At the moment when the natural environment was altered beyond the point that it could be personally observed, the definitions of knowledge itself began to change. No longer based on direct experience, knowledge began to depend upon scientific, technological, industrial proof...Now they tell us what nature is, what we are, how we relate to the cosmos, what we need for survival and happiness, and what are the appropriate ways to organize our existence...As we continue to separate ourselves from direct experience of the planet, the hierarchy of technoscience advances...The question of natural balance is now subordinated. Evolution is defined less in terms of planetary process than technological process.*

Forcing technological dependence and addiction is the modus operandi of the techno-driven society we inhabit. Dependence is the state of being influenced or determined by, reliant and conditional upon, something other than oneself. Addiction is to give up or over to an external source. Within the technological society, we give up ourselves. We trade our lives for a detached reality, for what we are told will be better days. Safety and comfort. New and improved. The first one's free. With each neoteric step taking us further. Up, up, and away. Until we can't live without all the previous steps. We can't imagine a world without them. We are hooked. Habituated

with progress, we become codependent with technology. We no longer trust our intuition or instincts. Our personal observations become suspect, not only to the logic of the system, but even to ourselves, unless they are corroborated by scientific or technological institutions. But, what compels us to want a more technified life? What personal emptiness drives this? What social pressures push this? Is there a physical dependency? And, perhaps most important, is recovery possible?

*The growing incidences of mental illness these days may be explained in part by the fact that the world we call real and which we ask people to live within and understand is itself open to question. The environment we live in is no longer connected to the planetary process which brought us all into being. It is solely the product of human mental process...We are left with no frame of reference untouched by human interpretation.*

Predominating spiritual and emotional unhealth is one clear indication that the current set-up is failing humans. Spiritually and emotionally strong and vigorous beings that can form deep independent and collective connections with the world are discouraged by a mechanistic, utilitarian, and materialist-driven world. We get our food from sanitized supermarkets, our water from bottles or piped in from chlorinating treatment centers, our emotional support from specialists with degrees on their walls and Internet chatrooms, and our sexual gratification from porn sites or online dating (or not at all). Our emotions are either sporadically jerked from all directions, or dulled to languid nothingness, while spirituality is perversely funneled into ideological and dogmatic institutions instead of real lived experience. The robustness and richness of life has been lost to the monotony of cold routine and ritual. In a our schizophrenic state, we must choose between a world to which we have no authentic connection, one which appears to us to be arbitrarily constructed, or a world outside of these processes, isolated from the technological society. But with our domesticated logic, which has not been allowed to develop in an organic and connected way, this is painfully difficult, often causing emotional swings ranging from ungrounded elation to deep depression. Confusion, delusion, apathy, isolation, and masochism occur on both sides of this dilemma. We are left painfully asking ourselves, (if we are able to break from our frenzy or wake from our stupor), "what is missing"? What social factors push this? What are the implications? Is there hope outside of self-help philosophies and New-Age pseudo-panaceas?

*It is obvious that plants are alive in more or less the way humans and other animals are. Our failure to see plants as living creatures, and appreciate ourselves as some kind of sped-up plant, is the result of our limited human perception, a sign of the boundaries of our senses or the degree to which we have allowed them to atrophy...We have become too speedy to perceive the slower rhythms of other life forms... Pretechnological peoples do not have to go through a slowing-down process. Surrounded by nature, with everything alive everywhere around them, they develop an automatic intimacy with the natural world...No sense maintains itself if not used. If a sense remains unused, it atrophies.*

Alterations in our perception of time and space shift as technological society expands. Since time is merely an abstract division of our lives into "usable" portions, the context it is measured from determines its characteristics. Domestication's timing is one of linearity, moving away from the earth's, and our own, cyclical timing. Rhythms change from multi-layered and complexly contrasting and reinforcing to mechanistic, sharp, and singular. Technological society is in a

constant state of acceleration, with the momentum of all previous developments behind it. With the force of this push, it becomes harder at each moment to slow down. While pockets of rest do occur, they are mere bubbles, after which the breakneck speed of the technological infrastructure persists. We become so used to this constant acceleration that it feels customary to us. We become more comfortable with the pace and methodology of technology. We start to mimic more and more of the artificial systems that “inhabit” our world. The computer becomes more of a system we relate to than any biological one. Our cars become our friends, and our cellphone an extension of ourselves. We begin to view them as indispensable. Communication is instantaneous across the globe, distorting all relationships, and collapsing our perception of lived space. We can chat with someone we will never meet in Brazil or we can eat sushi in Japan in a matter of hours. We not only experience space like never before, but our transit from place to place becomes unrelated exobiological points plotted on a map, rather than a lived experiential connection through the world. Our perception of these changes get blurred further and further as our relationship to time becomes more rapid. Our lives ticking away faster and faster, yet nothing seems to happen quick enough for us and there are so many places to go. We are profoundly ungrounded. How does this ever-quickenening and shrinking perspective of the world affect our lives and our relationships? How does it transform and distort our internal rhythms?

*It would be going too far to call our modern offices sensory-deprivation chambers, but they are most certainly sensory-reduction chambers. They may not brainwash, but the elimination of sensory stimuli definitely increases focus on the task at hand, the work to be done, the exclusion of all else.*

As we move from the life-based time of the eternal present to the planned time of the perpetual future, automation and specialization replace spontaneity and shared experience. Through automation, technology supersedes authentic experience and relationships. Automation controls and limits through systematic apparatus or process, turning action from a willed and free motion to a mechanical and involuntary response. It removes all life from activity. With the expansion of mass society, instrumental reason generates more advanced forms of labor division. The standardization and mechanization of the world becomes the norm, while organic and human-scale communities based on face-to-face and direct relationships disappear. We become cogs, or specialists, in a larger machine. Parts must submit to the logic of the whole. Our lives become a string of tasks for our accomplishment. We lose perspective on anything outside of these short-term and system-defined goals. We begin to lose our ability to even conceive of approaching the world outside of this method, and the ability to be self-reliant or independent from the system. Can we even begin to imagine what we might be losing in the automated process?

*Anything connected to natural (“savage”) awareness must be ridiculed and eliminated, and all experience must be contained within controlled artificial environments. In a large society, technology is a good standardizer, and confinement works best if technology has been enshrined...As technology has evolved, step by step, it has placed boundaries between human beings and their connections with larger, nonhuman realities. As life acquired ever more technological wrapping, human experience and understanding were confined and altered...until people’s minds and living patterns are so disconnected that there is no way of knowing reality from fantasy. At such a point, there is no choice*

*but to accept leadership, however arbitrary...Autocracy needn't come in the form of a person at all, or even as an articulated ideology or conscious conspiracy. The autocracy can exist in the technology itself. The technology can produce its own subordinated society.*

Technology's control over us has reached the status of super-god. It is no longer enough to ask the question "should we have technology?" or to examine its positive or negative attributes. It is ingrained in all of us on every aspect of our life, from womb to tomb. And there are even those who wish to submit to this deity even after death. We bow, often unknowingly, but certainly with a disfigured anticipation, to this techno-theocratic altar. Every creation, every solution, every emotion, every social organization is processed through a technological principle, which will always feedback upon itself. So we need not be persuaded to "keep the faith", since it is all that is available to us. Control is omnipresent, so brute force is rarely necessary. To most, resistance *appears* futile. Can we even recognize how deep the rabbit hole goes? And if we can, is our perception enough to break out of it? Is it possible to live a non-technological life within this world?

*Noting that reality and its definitions have now entered the realm of game and are up for grabs, they become better at the game than anyone else, exploiting it, reshaping disordered, uprooted minds and tilling a new bed of mental soil from which monsters will inevitably grow.*

The trajectory towards cybernetic neo-lives is not solely the desire for self-preservation and expansion by those controlling technological society, but also of its minions, believing they can be part of the super-god and intelligence of technology. Cybernetics moves towards an all-pervasive control over reality (both informational and physical), as it fully over-rides (yet mimics artificially) natural neuro-processes. It becomes the basis for a hybrid of biological, mechanical, and virtual systems. As we move toward an all-enveloping crisis on the environmental level, and as resources to run the technological system begin to dwindle (or at least become less efficient and profitable), the shift towards a world less restricted by material elements (and still plagued by human limitations) becomes the prospective direction. Through cybernetic research, along with biotechnology, the push to a colossal leap in evolution is proposed, and most are along for the ride, convinced that either this is the logical next step, that it is unavoidable, or that it is already too late. We are already witnessing the preliminary phases and most are quite open about this process. Is this civilization's last hope and endpoint? What are the consequences of this? Why do people accept this scenario?

*In one generation, out of hundreds of thousands in human evolution, America had become the first culture to have [almost completely] substituted secondary, mediated versions of experience for direct experience of the world. Interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted as experience, and the difference between the two was obscure to most of us.*

For those of us searching for a de-technified life, the contradiction of being both within technological society, and outside of it, is nearly unavoidable. Beyond running to the woods in a survivalist mode (which still has the dual problem of bringing our domesticated mind into that

situation and that, in a shrinking world, escape is becoming less and less possible), in a technologically ubiquitous world, we must reconcile this situation in order to maneuver and seek its destruction. Just as a bankrobber may need to change clothes and hair, cover tattoos, wear make-up, and better understand the functioning and security of the financial institution they are targeting, so may we need to become more observant of the technological system, become proficient in some of its operations, and temporarily “fit in”. Since every aspect of our lives is so ingrained with technological processes and apparatus, it is crucial for us to be critical of those processes, yet decide which we are willing to become skilled in, to utilize them for temporary goals. This can be a painful course, and also contains the potential for a slippery slope, with technological dependence or fetishization becoming negative possibilities. On a theoretical and critical level, there is nothing about technology that is beneficial to the human experience. But on a practical level, it seems somewhat necessary to have one foot in this world, although with extreme cynicism and caution, and certainly not exclusively, at the expense of authentic unmediated experience and practice. We must also be prepared to ask ourselves what it means, what are the consequences, of living this contradiction? And, how it can ultimately be destroyed?

*When people fully accept the idea that all reality exists solely in their own minds, and that nothing outside their minds is definitely, concretely real, each person then has unlimited personal power to create and define reality. It is now up for grabs. There is no cause. There is no effect. Relationships do not exist...In this denial of everyday worldly reality, all realities become totally arbitrary, creating the perfect precondition for the imposition of any new “ground of reality” within the void. Though it may be nonsensical or fantastic, any reality is acceptable...Reality becomes arbitrary only within the confines of a mental framework. People who live in direct contact with the planet itself are not concerned with such questions.*

Given our current reality, how can we begin to live differently? What could a less mediated, less technologically-dependent world look like for us here and now? Can we regain direct contact with our world? Does it just mean escape and isolation? How do we avoid post-modern complacency? Can there be a transition? These are all vital questions to ask ourselves, as we embark on a critique of, resistance to, and departure from this technologic nightmare that is worsening with each micro-second. While simply “going back” is not a possibility, the virus has been released and the techno-logic is everywhere, it is still encouraging that for most of our time on this planet, humans lived in direct connection with our world, without the mediating factors of technology and instrumental thinking. Perhaps our most significant lessons are here. Despite the bleak outlook, our future is still unwritten, and while I still maintain an ounce of strength and free will, while I am still of flesh and blood and can still discover and connect to my passions and dreams, *I am sure that I am not a Machine, I am a human being.*

\*All italicized quotes above are from “Argument One: The Mediation of Experience,” contained in Jerry Mander’s *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1977). While the book is dated, and contains some liberal notions of democratic process, Mander addresses perhaps the most pervasive, popular, and damaging form of technology of his time, television, which could easily be viewed as the predecessor of a much more destructive and alienating aspect of the technological system, the Internet. The first section of his book, “Argument One”, is the most impressive, as it deals very little with television per se, and addresses the much larger question of technology’s inevitable qualities of mediation.

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# **Meditation on Mediation: Direct Experience as Spirituality**

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2005

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*Disclaimer:* Any time one tries to articulate or define that which is only captured and constrained by words, there is bound to be a great degree of limitation, repetition, and vagueness. Hopefully, this can be minimized, but also, this lesson can point out the larger meaning of this essay.

He was lying banged and battered, skewered  
and bleeding  
Talking crippled on the cross  
Was his mind reeling and heaving hallucinating  
Fleeing what a loss  
The things he hadn't touched or kissed his senses  
Slowly stripped away  
Not like Buddha not like Vishnu  
Life wouldn't rise through him again  
I find it easy to believe  
That he might question his beliefs  
The beginning of the last temptation  
Dime store mystery<sup>1</sup>

There is all of this senseless, unhealthy, and intrusive stuff (some physical, but most not) *between* our world and us. Some of it is inherent to civilization with its logic of dislocation and disembodiment, some of it is socialized or installed in us as methods of control, and some of it we temporarily embrace in our attempt for efficiency, comfort, or for coping within this overwhelmingly dismal reality. This is, in essence, alienation; the separation of us from ourselves, from each other, and from life itself (although these are not truly distinct categories from each other). This is the complete opposite of the direct unmediated experience that I believe to be the fulfillment and celebration of our unique individual spirits connecting. Spirituality, for me, is a life-long process of ridding myself of this mediation. It is not a concept or idea, but the absence of abstraction and linear perception. It is not a place, but an ongoing unconscious linkage of liberatory moments within a lived context. It is not a path, but a life (worth living). It is not a practice, but simply being. We are all encrusted with horrific scars and are weighed down with clunky armor, but we still have an essence or spirit that, for many of us, is not yet broken or tamed. Connecting more fully to this spirit is to more deeply understand who I am, what I feel, and what my authentic desires might be. To be *spirituous* is to be refined or pure. Now, it seems odd to speak in such absolute terms (especially from where we are right now), but one could use this simple definition as meaning to be unmediated, unfractured, or whole — the essence of who we are. While this may seem like an abstract or ideal condition, the process of becoming less mediated, could be an important step in a spiritual reconnection to life. I feel that my spirit flows through (and in fact is) the physical, emotional, intellectual (and any other distinction we could arbitrarily make) together within and without me; there is no separation.

I would define a direct experience as an immediate situation or way of being that does not rely on the symbolic to understand and define our experience, and one that is not mediated by ideology, agenda, and personal baggage (that is, what is imposed upon us through various experiences and socializations). It is understandable that in our current reality, where the symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics by Lou Reed, "Dime Store Mystery" (from the *New York* album)

methods of understanding, communicating, and navigating through the world are almost all we have to operate with (the rules of engagement), that we temporarily consent to a certain degree of its control in our lives (explaining complex situations, communicating over long distance, making plans, traffic lights, etc). But the one realm where this is absolutely unnecessary, and in fact, where it is ultimately inhibiting, is our spiritual endeavors (and possibly sexual experience, which can deeply relate to spirituality as well, but that's another essay). On a fundamental level, how we view ourselves and how we are connected within the context of our bodies, our minds, our relationship to others, and the world, inform how we move through the world and relate to others, and are therefore relevant to any anarchist discourse.

## Mind and Body: Philosophical Traditions of Separation, Dualism, and Resolve

The duality of nature, godly nature,  
Human nature splits the soul  
Fully human, fully divine and divided  
The great immortal soul  
Split into pieces, whirling pieces, opposites  
Attract  
From the front, the side, the back  
The mind itself attacks  
I know the feeling, I know it from before  
Descartes through Hegel belief is never sure  
Dime store mystery, last temptation<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the interconnectedness of everything and within ourselves is in opposition to most conventional philosophic traditions, which attempt to compartmentalize, sever, and dissect rather than see the confluence within. The influential Western thinker who first comes to mind, Rene Descartes, clearly articulated what has always been the basis for domestication throughout civilization, a strict mind-body dualism. His Cartesian model of the world rigorously cuts the connection between our bodies and our mind, viewing our physicality as merely complex machinery willed by God.

This is at the root of Western society, and in a general way, civilization itself. Disconnected from our bodies, Descartes believed in three sources for our ideas: the adventitious (from outside the mind), the factitious (manufactured by the mind), and the innate (imprinted on the mind by God). In his various *Meditations*, he explored how we understand the world and used "reason" to deduce his thoughts on materiality and divinity, giving most credence to the latter. Believing God to be perfection and truth, he held that every mental act has two distinct elements moved by God: understanding, which observes and perceives; and the will, which approves or agrees with the belief in question. Since God gives both, he saw them as virtually flawless, and that "error" or "unreasonableness" is a moral failing or a *going against* of truth. The idea of a mind-body split, supports the idea that the mind is created, and more or less controlled by God, while the body independently performs an assortment of repetitive and mundane physical tasks. This concept

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

follows through to the idea of immortality of the human mind or “soul”, unaffected by death of the physical organism.

This separation also sets the stage for scientists to rely on observation for their mechanistic view distinct from “divine” or “mystical” explanations. Other Cartesian metaphysicians built on Descartes’ ideas, describing varying degrees of synchronization or paralleling concepts between mind and body, but all accepting a fundamental split, and all seeing us essentially as minds linked to God, or at best, a mode or piece of the wholeness of God, who coordinates our actions. Cartesian philosophers have in common with many spiritual thinkers the orientation of moving beyond the physical, or *transcending* the material to the spiritual. In hopes of escaping the “dirty”, “bloody”, and “painful” aspects of life, they create this distinction in order to elevate above the “profane” and “foulness” to the “sacred” and “pure”. The *somewhere* or *somehow* or *someone* that is elsewhere, that we can “link to” (through prayer, meditation, devotion, etc) relieves us of the immediate difficulties of our physical reality. It allows us to tolerate intolerable conditions and behaviors, as well as rationalizing the acceptance of power over us. Attempting to find significant or ultimate meaning detached from the physical is at the core of our dysfunctional society, yet being open to, believing in, or feeling things that conflict with our “knowledge” of physicality can be a powerful non-rational perspective, provided it is coupled with deep and integral connection to the physical. While I feel the need to place a higher value on what I can see and touch, I also don’t want to be purely a materialist. Rather than seeing the spirit as something separate that we fasten to, like a power plant, or something that adjoins or travels through both body and mind like electricity through a wire, spirit could be understood as the essence of the unseparated (unalienated) wholeness.

Another common philosophical thread is that of exploring the tension between the subjective and the objective. With Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s “absolute idealism” (and idealists who followed), we see a critique of traditional distinctions between objective and subjective understanding and the development of dialectical accounts of human consciousness, including the individual sensation through the social to that of a World-Spirit. A tension is then seen between intelligence and object, or the knower and the known. Hegel believed in a fundamental unity or absolute consciousness to connect all subjective egos and a logic (dialectical in character) to study its fundamental structure of reality. Seeing Spirit as the grand synthesis of the self-knowing and the self-actualizing totality of all that is, Hegel saw human thought as one portion of the Becoming of Absolute Spirit. Considered subjectively, Spirit may be observed through the structure of thought in each individual, with consciousness striving for perfect knowledge through a movement of thesis through antithesis to synthesis. Considered objectively, Spirit involves the interaction among multiple selves. Most purely, Hegel viewed the synthesis as the Absolute Spirit, a historical process of expanding human awareness of the fundamental unity of all reality, gradually discovering and expressing its true nature. This idealism, and its promise of inherent or underlying unification, complete with “logical” explanations, is progressive in nature, and essentially leads to a dependence on religion, nationalism, utilitarianism, and optimism. Max Stirner took Hegel’s resolution of dualisms further to create a triad of Materialist-Idealist-Egoist, attempting to collapse idealism and connecting philosophy to the individual outside the fixed idea proposing a synthesis found in the interest of the *unique* — the egoist. While Friedrich Nietzsche set the goals for the egoist as creation beyond oneself, Stirner focused on consumption and the temporary and finite ego’s appropriation of the world as is, to make it one’s own. Stirner pointed out that lords and gods obey nothing beyond themselves and set themselves up

as the supreme morality to serve. Rather than serving these “great egoists”, Stirner proposed to be the egoist himself (and ourselves), but rather than imploring us to follow, entices us by example, avoiding the creation of a new illusion to submit to. Stirner’s egoism becomes merely the following of one’s own interests and desires as a unique being, and the investigation of what that might be. There is no external moral or reference point outside the values of the egoist. All relationships then are willed and hold no intrinsic status or permanent bonds, and are simply the union of independent and conscious egoists. Perhaps most important in Stirner’s realizations is the relation to one’s self. He sets up mere “valuing” life against “enjoyment” of life, in which the former one is the object to be secured, and the latter one is the subject of all valuing relations. In the question of “who am I?” which has its response in the person who asks it, Stirner speaks of a “nothing” which is not one of emptiness, but instead one without imposed or predetermined value, a “creative nothing” to be filled with spontaneous passions and relationships.

Stirner had a very positive influence in the realm of philosophy, but still, somewhat limited as an anthropocentric perspective, unless the egoist could also be a bird, a river, a rock, or a constellation. Ultimately, the intellectualization of spirituality (philosophy) has severe limitations.

## Releasing the Flow: Detouring from Paths, Rituals, Specialists, the Sacred, and Religion

I was sitting drumming thinking thumping  
pondering  
The mysteries of life  
Outside the city shrieking screaming whispering  
The mysteries of life<sup>3</sup>

Some people see spirituality as a path to travel, and the more worn the path, the more “true” or “meaningful” it must be. This only reveals fear and laziness. Fear, because people distrust themselves, being stripped of confidence, and are only partial beings dependent on experts in a society fragmented and stratified by specialization. Lazy, because they are encouraged to take a path of least resistance and “rewarded” for being uncritical and uncreative, willing to accept a belief system rather than dwell in the realm of experience and mystery. They develop a *practice*, rather than a spiritual life of *being*. Often, we mistake the specifics of the process for the energy that moves it, or that it *is*. Instead, the method is infused with meaning rather than the experience itself. For instance, we can understand and experience a forest in many ways (scientifically, historically, emotionally, etc), each revealing a particular aspect but not its spirit (although, within the symbolic, sometimes poetry and music offer tingly glimpses). Typically, we move through a forest on a path, one made through ritualistic habit by humans or through repetitious instinctual usage (by deer for instance). We ordinarily stay on this path, making slight excursions off it to encounter “unique spaces” (epiphany or temptation). This mode of encounter is typical of the “spiritual path” model. We place a higher value on what has come before (because “they must know best” or “others have done it”) than in our own spontaneous and passionate desires.

I propose that a more direct, less mediated, and more experiential way to open up is to skeptically distinguish the path as one limited route, and to fully immerse oneself in the forest (bush-

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

whacking, climbing, swimming, rolling, sleeping, eating, shitting, breathing, singing, remembering, etc). In the first method (the path), we actually go around the forest. It is on either side of us, rather than into the forest, and the forest into us. We are alienated from it through the method, rather than *part of it* through experience. Again, this hints at the object-subject dualism that creates problematic relationships and barely partial comprehension. Mediation is a *path around* rather than *immersion into*.

Ritual, including ceremony, prayer, chanting, sacrifice, etc, is the typical form of mediated spirituality or “spiritual expression” (a phrase which should hint at its alienated attributes). It funnels our experience and motivations into premeditated and rehearsed ceremonial conformity. When we define our spirituality by others’ previous accounts or standards, we submit and define our spirit to their limitations. Ritual has all but replaced spiritual being and is the manifestation of a spiritually impoverished and fractured society. We ritualize every aspect of our lives, replacing authentic moments with predetermined ones. Like neurotic obsessive-compulsive drones, we go through the motions (Rosary Beads, Buddhist chants, Pagan dances, etc) thinking this is connection and substance. Even if we knew the supposed “purpose” of these rituals, which we often do not, their meanings are specific to very particular places, people, and times. Even these “original” meanings were mediated expressions or alienated procedures, so their postmodern imitations are surely doubly dubious. New Age, the salad bar of spirituality, sifts through the many spiritual manifestations and religions in an attempt to glean “positive” aspects from each and re-contextualize them into one’s particular world-view, typically filling spiritual emptiness with the de-spiritualized motions and rituals of others. It is the spiritual cop-out for the lethargic and uncreative and for those who view everything as a commodity to consume, or who eternally search for the miracle cure or magic pill (or those who purchase metaphysical lottery tickets). New Age is not a specific path (although there are some common trajectories used), but instead, a postmodern excuse for tiresome superficiality. New Agers will pull out the “appropriate” ritual for any situation or the “suitable” prayer for each moment, and yet reek of eternal emptiness, buzzing from one path to the next more often than many of us change our socks.

Another unsettling aspect of traditional and conventional spirituality is that of the specialist (shaman, master, guru, priest, etc). While making it more convenient to approach a certain spiritual paradigm, these experts actually move us further from our direct experience into that of ceremony and religion. If spirituality were merely a technical matter, it would almost seem reasonable to approach an expert for advice, guidance, or even direction, temporarily forgetting the issues of power and lack of subjectivity that surround them. Shamans, for instance, throughout the history of external spiritual expression and ritualized practice, have monopolized the link to the “other”. While there has also been the role of shaman as healer and visionary (which also contain problematic aspects of hyper-specialization), typically they are at the root of a stratified society based on division of labor and of specialized knowledge and power. This limits the individual’s access to a spiritual life, and again, funnels it through a vessel with one finite and ritualized perspective. As a society increases in scale, power becomes multiplied, and a class of priests collaborates and creates a body of “knowledge” and customs as a mystified society within a society. While the dynamics of gurus, masters, priests, and other specialists have varying levels of power depending on the situation, they all share the intrinsic element of mediator.

The concept of “the sacred” is another questionable notion often linked to a quest for spirituality. This encompasses themes in which certain domains are viewed as sacred, everything is sacred, or nothing is sacred, each with its own specific rationale, reactive position, and custom.

The human/divine split is encompassed within the idea that certain things, beings, actions, or realms are exclusively sacred, in which we, as humans, inhabit a corrupt and profane world, and that the sacred is “untouchable” by the mortal and “lesser” being, except through mediated and specialized customs and people. This is the basis for a complete separation. The concept of everything being sacred, views all of this world, and beyond, as divine and proposes specific morally grounded methods and practices for interaction with our world. The concept of nothing being sacred (while of most interest to me as an independent unique being relating to my world) is often, unfortunately, a rationale for self-indulgent destruction of the world and the whimsical oppression of everything outside ourselves. Probably the most helpful way to approach the concept of profanity/sacredness, is to avoid the abstraction altogether and develop unique relationships outside this false dichotomy.

Paths, rituals, specialists, and concepts of the sacred are all vital components of the institutionalization of spirituality — religion. Obviously, the discussion of this particular subject is a long one, and best left for anarchist ABC’s, but it does represent the fulfillment and summation of all of the negative and alienated projects of spirituality, and in fact, stands on the opposite extreme to an unmediated spirituality.

The perpetuation of ideological, moral, or religious confinements are, in essence, a profound form of mediation from a free, willed, direct experience absent of imposed bonds and limitations. Another significant problem with any religious-centered view (beyond the personally limiting and inadequate nature of it) is that it creates, like any form of ideology, an abstract bias, self-righteous attitude, and the conception of an “other”. Once traveled down, this slope gets slipperier as morality and dogmatism become all-consuming. Religion is the endpoint, and complete deadness of spirit.

## Neither Here Nor There: Living Outside of the Mediated Framework

There’s a funeral tomorrow  
At St. Patrick’s the bells will ring for you  
Ah, what must you have been thinking  
When you realized the time had come for you  
I wish I hadn’t thrown away my time  
On so much human and so much less divine  
The end of the last temptation  
The end of a dime store mystery<sup>4</sup>

Spirituality, for me, is the ability to directly connect without defining or creating a solidified framework or even desiring to express the experience. By its very nature it is unexplainable. Anytime we try to express these experiences, by the very character of representation, they cannot be direct experiences; they are outside us and move further from us as an abstract medium that is only a pale reflection. Anytime we limit our experiences through ritual, paths, specialists, ideology, religion, morality etc, we mediate our lives through an imposed and artificial condition that is inherently repressive and stifling to our spirit. The experience of expanding ourselves, opening ourselves, and understanding ourselves in a free and unlimited way is where I derive significance

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<sup>4</sup> ibid

of being. Spirituality can be burning a church, the Grand Canyon at sundown, a snowflake on your tongue, a flash of *deja vu*, a tingle up your spine, an unrestrained orgasm, sharing deep intimacy... really anytime we are fully present in ourselves and in the world without barriers. How we relate or connect to our spirit or our unmediated being is always different from person to person, and even within ourselves; in other words, always in a perpetual state of flux.

We are all part of the earth. All detachment, elevation, or transcendence is an illusion. All we can do is move closer or further from life and ourselves. This should not be mistaken, however, for a “return to Eden” undertaking. Sure, in my opinion, life for humans (and all other beings) was qualitatively richer and healthier before civilization’s annihilation of connectivity, but “return” is merely a reversal of the linearity of progressivism. Just as wildness is not something to preserve or restore, but something *inside us* to connect to and present in all of our relationships. Living free now and ultimately being released in a complete physical sense as our flesh becomes the nourishment for future life is all we can “know”. “We’re all gonna be just dirt in the ground” (meditate on that for a while). Our ego is for now, the moment, and is the basis for infinite possibilities of connection. Our ideas and thoughts are the expression of our ego, the now, and helps us to momentarily distinguish ourselves from everything else of which we are intricately a part. There is no way out (this is not merely an objective analysis, but also a subjective celebration)... we are connected! We are influenced and we influence. Under all our mediation, we are spirit.

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